

Do not ask how? - A Critical Stylistic Approach to Sherko Bekas' Poem 'The Martyrs' Wedding'

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Abstract

During the time of Ba'athist Iraq (1968-2003), an incident occurred in Kurdish poet Sherko Bekas' hometown Sulaimaniyah. Three students were shot dead on December 17, 1985. Their deaths prompted Bekas to write his poem "The Martyrs' Wedding". This paper approaches the linguistic construction of the three martyred students by using the framework of Critical Stylistics (Jeffries 2010). This approach is a further development of a stylistic analysis of poetry and especially suits to detect ideological meaning in the text as Bekas used the art of poetic writing to express his political stance on the murders. This analysis focuses on the repeated use of "three" in pre-modifying positions when naming the students and on negation foregrounded most prominently in eleven repetitions of the phrase "Do not ask (how)". The present paper shows a way to decipher Bekas political statement by means of a detailed stylistic analysis and another critical view is added because this text is one of those that has the 'power to influence us' (Jeffries, 2010 p. 1).

Keywords: Poetry, Critical Stylistics, Sherko Bekas, Iraq

1. Introduction

In this paper, we analyse the linguistic construction of three murdered students (Aram Muhammed Karim, Sardar Osman Faraj and Hiwa Faris Fayege) in a poem by Sherko Bekas, a famous Kurdish poet. He was born in Sulaymaniyah in 1940 and died in exile in Sweden on August 4th, 2013.

The three students were shot dead on December 17th, 1985, one month after they were arrested in front of their school for political reasons. Their deaths led to an outcry and protests against Sheikh Jaafar Barzinji, the governor of the province during Saddam Hussein's regime, and prompted Bekas to write his poem 'The Martyrs' Wedding'. about the three sons of his hometown Sulaymaniyah. From an early age, Bekas had taken a political stance, not only in his poetic texts but also by joining the Peshmerga. During the time of Ba'athist power (1968-2003), the said incident occurred in Bekas' hometown Sulaymaniyah in the north of Iraq, and Bekas could not remain silent about it.

In our paper, we approach the linguistic construction of the three martyred students by using the framework of Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010). This approach is a further development of a stylistic analysis of poetry and especially suited to detect ideological meaning in texts as Bekas, first and foremost, uses the art of poetic writing to express his political stance on the murders.

With political texts like the poem under scrutiny it is crucial to avoid or at least minimize bias when conducting an analysis. This is best achieved if an analytical framework is followed that guides the analysis instead of the researcher subjectively choosing those parts of the text or the analytical tools that fit a prefabricated result. Critical Stylistics provides such a framework and if followed through, a result emerges almost by itself that the analyst then has to interpret. The effect of a reduced bias when conducting an analysis by using Critical Stylistics has been demonstrated by Jeffries (2007) in her analysis of hegemonic discourse on the female body, Coffey-Glover (2019) in her research on masculinity in women's magazines or Tabbert (2015, 2016) on the construction of criminal offenders in the German and UK press. With regard to poetry by Bekas, Ibrahim (2016) has provided a comprehensive Critical Stylistic analysis of Bekas' Divan. With this paper, we build on

earlier work on selected works from Bekas' œuvre (Ibrahim, 2016, 2018, 2021; Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2021) where we have shown that Critical Stylistics is particularly suited for the analysis of Bekas' poetry because it is to a large extent written with a political message.

Critical Stylistics formulates ten textual-conceptual functions of texts, among them naming and describing entities (e.g. the meaning created by Bekas' repeated use of 'three' in pre-modifying positions when naming the students), and their linguistic realizations (e.g. which is an analysis of noun phrases with headnoun, pre- and postmodification) which will be one focus of the analysis we present in this paper.

Another textual-conceptual function of texts is, for example, the representation of actions, events and states where Jeffries recommends conducting an analysis of the predicator, that is the verb phrase, by means of transitivity analysis (Simpson 1993), meaning whether the verb phrase represents a material action process or a relational process etc.

For an introduction to Critical Stylistics we invite the reader to follow up Jeffries' (2010) introductory textbook as we do not have the space here to outline the framework in its entirety but will return to it in a bit more detail in Section 4.

The reader will, however, encounter the presentation of results from another textual-conceptual function of texts which is negation and the creation of implied meaning. In particular, we look at negation in this rather lengthy poem, foregrounded most prominently in eleven repetitions of the phrase "Do not ask (how)". Negation, as Nahajec (2012) argues in line with other researchers, can only be understood by imagining the presence as a necessary intermediate phase leading to an understanding of the absence. With regard to the poem under scrutiny, the repeated request not to ask how leads, first of all, to the intermediate phase of asking that question before it is negated in a second step which, we argue, has multiple layers of meaning as outlined below.

Before we present our analysis, the paper introduces the reader to Bekas and mentions one of his main achievements for the development of Kurdish poetry, namely being a founding member of the *Rwanga* movement. We then continue with a brief outline of Critical Stylistics before we present two findings of our analysis, namely the naming choices for the students who were killed and the repeated use of "three" (from the textual-conceptual function of naming and describing entities) as well as the repetition of the phrase "do not ask (how)" (from the textual-conceptual function of negation and implied meaning). We conclude on broadening the perspective from an analysis at the microlevel to positioning Bekas as the writer where we also mention transitivity choices as all linguistic features together create Bekas' point of view on the event reported on in the poem.

2. Sherko Bekas and his time

Sherko Bekas was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. His father is Faiq Bekas (1905-1948), a well-known Kurdish poet within traditional Kurdish poetry. Bekas lived in an era (from the inception of modern Iraq up until 1991) when the Kurds had been viewed as being second-class citizens. The discrimination increased during Saddam Hussein's regime (Ba'athist government from 1968 to 2003) and was practiced in the educational and cultural sectors as well as in the job market. The situation further escalated in 1988 with the destructing of over 3,000 Kurdish villages, more than 40 chemical attacks, one even killed over 5,000 Kurds in Halabja, and a total of 100,000 civilians buried after mass killings. This political situation is of importance for the poem analysed in this paper because at the time of the killings of the three students in 1985, the governor of the province of Sulaymaniyah, Sheikh Jaafar Barzinji, had already been facing far-reaching protests from the (mainly Kurdish) people in the region. Some historians even go as far as to compare Barzinji's crimes

against the Kurdish people to the Massacre of Jews in World War II by the Nazi regime in Germany (unknown, 2019) .

Bekas published his first book when he was 17 years old. At a very young age, Bekas enlisted in the Peshmerga and worked as a 'party poet' for the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, a major political party in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), a semi-autonomous region in Iraq (Levinson-LaBrosse, 2018). He joined the Kurdish Liberation Movement in 1965 and worked for their radio station (The Voice of Kurdistan). In seeking 'new aspects and dimensions' for the thus far heavily arabised Kurdish poetry, Bekas turned to international texts and, for example, translated Ernest Hemmingway's 'The Old Man and the Sea' into Kurdish.

Bekas joined the second Kurdish Liberation Movement in 1974. After the failure of that movement, the Ba'ath regime exiled Bekas to the middle of Iraq where he stayed for three years. On 8th August 1987 in a speech at Folkore Hois (The Whole Sky of my Borders, 8th August 1987) he stated that he considered himself the poet 'of all Kurdish nation, the poet of revolution and Peshmergas' and continued by saying 'I consider myself the mother poet of Kurdistan'. His poetry depicts his political, literary beliefs and cultural community wishes, aims, and preferences (Bekas, 2006, p. 16) as we will see when analysing his poem 'The Martyrs' Wedding'.

In 1986, he was exiled by the Iraqi regime to Sweden where he published 'The Small Mirrors' in 1987 and 'Butterfly Valley' in 1991. In both poem collections, he mourns the victims of Kurdistan. Following the uprisings in Kurdistan in March 1991, Bekas returned to Iraqi Kurdistan. After the 1991 Gulf War, the already mentioned semi-autonomous Kurdish region KRG was created in northern Iraq and the Iraqi government withdrew its troops. In the first regional election, Bekas was elected a member of the Kurdish parliament and became Minister of Culture in the first Kurdish government. In 1993, he resigned from his position because of what he regarded as violations of democracy.

Beka's work is widespread and well-known beyond the borders of his homeland which allows researchers to study his œuvre in several languages because some of his works have been translated into Arabic, Italian, Swedish, French, German, and English. He has read some of his poems in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the United Kingdom, Russia, and Italy, where he was named an honorary citizen of Milan. He paid a visit to the United States in 1990 and has a proven international reputation for his literary works.

His poetry is mainly studied from a perspective of literary criticism (Abdulqadir, 2019; Ali, 2009; Darwish & Salih, 2019; Fahmi & Dizayi, 2018; Mala, 2012; Mohammad & Mira, 2018; Muhammed, 2001; Omer, 2011; Tabari, Parsa, & Gozashti, 2015). These studies reveal the different techniques Bekas uses in his writings to depict the political and social situation. One of the present authors (Ibrahim, 2018), however, employed a critical stylistic perspective to primarily reveal ideological meaning in Bekas' texts and is thus the first to apply Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) to Kurdish poetry. The present authors have continued their work on Bekas' texts and published an analysis of the poem 'Sculpture' from the poem collection 'The Small Mirrors' (Ibrahim, 2021; Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2021).

3. Bekas, poetry and the Rwanga movement

Bekas had a huge influence on the development of Kurdish poetry. Whereas in the generation of poets including Bekas' father, major attention was being paid to rhyme and rhythm, Bekas together with other poets and writers founded the Rwanga movement in 1970 (Fahmi & Dizayi, 2018). Rwanga poetry was a reaction to the social and political situation and is considered to be 'one of the fruitful consequences of the socio-political developments' (Fahmi & Dizayi, 2018, p. 72). Poets from the Rwanga movement tried to adjust poetry to real life (Naderi, 2011, p. 32), thus, it breaks from the traditional rules of rhyme and rhythm

to express many beautiful fantasies. Rwanga allows poets to express their vision accurately and overcome the boundaries of language. This was a radical change in Kurdish poetry (Riengard & Mirza, 1998, p. 8). From his experience of translating works of world literature into Kurdish, Bekas identified 'new elements in the world literature' and utilised them in his own poetry (Fahmi & Dizayi, 2018 p. 73). Bekas stated in an interview that this movement aims to explain that their desires are 'free to discover what has not yet been discovered, to mix local and global languages in new and creative writings, and to support freedom all over the world' (Dhiab, 2007 p. 132).

Many of Bekas' poems emphasise the importance of poetry as a powerful weapon to pursue global recognition of Kurdish culture and rights. Political attempts to oppress Bekas, as mentioned by Bachtyar Ali (Bekas, 2019, p. 7ff), failed. On the contrary, his tireless work for the Kurdish people and against oppression was recognised by awarding him with the Swedish Tucholsky Award in 1988. The reason to mention the Rwanga movement and its relevance to this paper are twofold. First, it allows us to argue that Bekas was well aware of 'elements in the world literature' and used them in his own poetic writing. Those 'elements' can be explored by taking a stylistic approach which justifies our methodology (Critical Stylistics, developed at the University of Huddersfield in the UK) given that we are dealing with a text written in Sorani and translated by one of the present authors. Secondly, mentioning the Rwanga movement allows for our argument that Bekas' text has a foremost political meaning and underlines why it is important to reduce our researchers' bias when conducting the analysis and therefore again underlines the need for a framework that is interested in revealing and uncovering underlying ideologies and ideological meaning in texts like Critical Stylistics offers the means to do that.

4. Critical Stylistics as our methodological approach

Before we present our analysis, we begin with an introduction to the framework of Critical Stylistics, developed by Prof. Lesley Jeffries at the University of Huddersfield, UK. Critical Stylistics is a text-based framework for doing Critical Discourse Analysis. From her experience as a teacher, Jeffries saw the necessity to provide her students with a framework that guides them when approaching a text and doing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Jeffries acknowledges that CDA does not offer such a framework but most scholars choose their own method of analysis which frequently includes transitivity analysis, speech acts, modality, lexical and syntactic structure (Jeffries, 2010, p. 13). This way, one might criticise results and conclusions drawn from a CDA approach and claim that the analyst subjectively chose the tools to verify pre-fabricated results. Jeffries claims that because CDA aims to expose ideological stances presented in the analysed text, any claims of bias should carefully be avoided. One means to do so is to secure replicability of the analysis by following a framework such as the one provided by Critical Stylistics which allows the analyst to remain in an objective position as opposed to a manipulative position where too many choices are made subjectively.

Critical Stylistics builds on the tools used in Stylistics as well as established linguistic foundations like Saussure's (1986) distinction between langue and parole, speech act theory (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969) and Halliday's (1985) three metafunctions of language. Based on these foundations, Jeffries developed ten textual-conceptual functions of texts, like Naming and Describing or Representing actions/events/states. Under each of these functions she lists linguistic realisations like, for instance, for Naming and Describing she recommends to analyse the build-up of noun phrases with their pre- and postmodifications, nominalisation and apposition. In the category of Representing actions/events and states, Jeffries recommends to look at the verb phrase and to analyse transitivity mainly. For a more comprehensive introduction to Critical Stylistics, the reader is referred to Jeffries' book 'Critical Stylistics' (2010) as well as to both present authors' applications of Critical Stylistics

to the topic of representations of crimes and criminals (Tabbert, 2015, 2016) and, as mentioned, to the canon of Bekas' poems (Ibrahim, 2016, 2018, 2021; Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2021).

When approaching 'The Martyrs' Wedding' we are aware that this text carries political, that is ideological, meaning as Bekas presents his view and judgement of the incident. With one of the present authors being of Kurdish origin, we are critically aware of a possible bias in our analysis and therefore strictly follow the framework of Critical Stylistics in order to preempt criticism in that respect. However, as every text carries ideological meaning, so does this paper which means that despite all precautions there might still be the possibility that our personal views on the incident are visible in this paper.

For clarification, we acknowledge that linguistic meaning making happens on two planes, namely meaning is projected by the text through textual features (semantics, pragmatics and grammatical structure) which trigger meaning and, on a different plane, meaning making happens in the mind of the reader who constructs meaning by bringing their world knowledge to the text (Semino, 1997, p. 125). Therefore, Jeffries in her framework of Critical stylistics talks about textual-conceptual functions of texts, combining textual and conceptual meaning-making. This meaning becomes ideological when values are attached to the constructed text world following a judgemental process (Jeffries, 2015). Bekas, as we will see, does attach his own value judgements about the incident to the textual meaning and it is our aim to decipher and proof it linguistically.

5. 'The Martyrs' Wedding' in the computer and the analysis

We began our analysis by one of the present authors translating the poem into English. Although Bekas is a well-known poet, not all of his works have been translated into other languages and we know of no translation of 'The Martyrs' Wedding' into English. In a next step, we converted the .docx file into a .txt file to make the text readable for the software package AntConc (Anthony, 2022). Although we could have counted the words manually, using a software tool allows us to gain results much quicker. At the top of the wordlist (which lists all the words in the poem according to their frequency) we found 'three' (28 occurrences) and 'not' (17 occurrences)/ 'no' (8 occurrences). We present our analysis and findings with regard to these three words as we are aware of the time and space limit for our presentation.

5.1. Naming and Describing the killed students (The cardinal number “three”)

The cardinal number 'three' is used in premodifying positions or in complement slots, further describing a head noun so that the analysis presented here falls under the textual-conceptual function of naming and describing entities. 'Three' first occurs on page 4 of the poem, 505 words into the English text. It co-occurs with itself, mainly in clusters, meaning we find at least two occurrences in close proximity to each other. Due to space constraints, we look at the biggest cluster ranging from lines 161 through 180 (we highlighted all occurrences of 'three' in red and have numbered the lines for ease of reference):

159 December 17th, a sunny morning,
160 It was a big marriage.
161 He was the king of our three sons.
162 They were three grooms.
163 There were no brides,
164 There were no three shy flowers
165 There were no three legs of the highland of kalikhani
166 They were three red dressed grooms
167 There were no brides,
168 There were not three girls

169 Not three (young cute) girls such as white shirt pears
170 they were three Wanawasha with blue T-shirts
171 not three dotted partridges.
172 There were three grooms, no brides.
173 The brides were all the girls of Sulaymaniyah and Kurdistan!
174 The brides were the daughters of Zozan and Kwestan.
175 They are three knight/horsemen sons-in-law
176 They were three storms
177 But the beloved and the fiancée with flowers in their hands
178 Were thousands of Khaj, sherry, and parikh
179 They were three groomed mountains
180 The brides were not three.
181 River.. was a bride.
182 Snow.. was a bride.
183 Garden was a bride.
184 Poetry.. was a bride.
(cited from the poem 'The Martyrs' Wedding' by Sherko Bekas)

Out of a total of 28 occurrences of the word 'three' in the entire poem, 14 and thus 50 % are to be found in the lines of the passage cited above.

The numeral adjective 'three' in the context of this poem has multiple layers of meaning:

- 'three' refers to the number of students who were killed in the incident on December 17, 1985

- 'three' in rhetorics indicates completeness or even perfection. It shows in the Bible (trinity of father, son and holy ghost) as well as in the Qur'an (the shortest Surahs - Al-Kawthar/Abundance (108) and Al-Asr/Time through Ages (103) - consist of three verses each). Three is called a triade, meaning it has a beginning, a middle and an end. 'Three' refers to the build-up of the world (heaven, earth, water) as well as of a human being (body, soul, spirit). Time is divided into three periods (past, present, future) as is human life (birth, life, death).

- 'three' occurs three times in a pre-modifying position to the head noun 'groom' (lines 162, 166, 172), naming the killed students. Furthermore, the students are named with reference to nature (Wanshwa/violet (with blue T-shirts), storms, groomed mountains) as well as with reference to family relations (sons, sons-in-law). What makes it clear that these metaphorical naming choices also refer to the killed students is the pre-modifying cardinal number 'three' that unites all these naming choices and foregrounds the number itself and the different layers of meaning it has in the poem by means of repetition.

- other than what the three students are, it is also worth looking at what they are not and at what is not there for them which means that we extend our analysis to include negated and oppositional meaning. Lines 170, 171 present an opposition between what the killed students are and what they are not:

170 they were three Wanawasha with blue T-shirts
171 not three dotted partridges

Here we notice an ellipsis because subject and predicator ('they were') are not repeated in line 171. Nevertheless, the parallel syntactic structure in these two lines is still intact, the same structure as in the majority of lines presented in the extract under scrutiny. However, the syntactic difference by means of the ellipsis leads to an imbalance because of the omission and thus shorter form in line 171. This brings in a subtle feeling that not all is well or a slight uneasiness and increases the pathos of the scene.

Parallelism as well as repetition are means to create a foregrounding effect. The noun phrases in a subject complement position are foregrounded ('Wanawasha with blue T-shirts', 'dotted partridges'), both noun phrases being further pre-modified by the cardinal number 'three'. Comparing the two subject complement slots, however, finds that the parallelism is interrupted as there is postmodification of the head noun by means of a prepositional phrase in line 170 but not in line 171 which underlines this feeling of imbalance and uneasiness mentioned before. The just described parallelism together with negation lead to the creation of oppositional meaning between the two head nouns 'Wanawasha' (or violet, a flower that grows in Kurdistan) and 'partridges' (here Bekas uses the Kurdish word for the female partridge). Although both nouns refer to nature, 'partridge' names an animal and 'Wanawasha' (that is a violet) a flower.

The meat of a female partridge is more delicious and more valuable than that of its male counterpart because female partridges offer less meat as they are smaller. Furthermore, female partridges are known to be more peaceful as opposed to their male counterparts. With regard to politics, female partridges in Kurdish culture are furthest away from any political meaning or dispute.

Wanawasha (violet) is used as medication and is either taken orally or it is sniffed, to treat different diseases such as coughs, flu, breathing sores and all the pain of the throat. In Kurdish culture, the violet is also used to produce olive oil, rosewater or as an ingredient in creams. Smelling the Wanawasha helps to alleviate anxiety and insomnia. Naming the students 'three Wanshwa' means that killing them is actually an act of killing nature. This underlines the brutality of the killings and evokes the notion of the three killed students being 'ideal victims' (Christie, 1986) in terms of their victimhood status, the same as, for example, the fictional character of Little Red Riding Hood from the same-named fairytale who is innocent and unaware of the danger she is in.

- However, not only the cardinal number 'three' or 'trio' (line 195) contribute to a foregrounding of the number of the students who were killed. We also find
- an actual list of three romantically involved characters ('Khaj, sherry, and parikh', line 178),
- a triple repetition of the modal adverb 'maybe' in line 55 or
- three negated verb forms in a row 'does not blink, neither faints nor dies' (lines 61 through 63) as well as
- three parallel syntactic structures 'will be the suns, will be moons, will be kings' (lines 137 through 139).

Bekas thus foregrounds the number 'three' at various linguistic levels, first and quite obviously by a frequent use of the actual numeral adjective but also by means of three-part-lists, triple repetition, syntactic structure and negation. The latter brings us to our second part of the analysis, namely the use of negation and thus the creation of implied meaning in the poem.

5.2 The use of negation and implicitness (Positioning Bekas as the author)

In this section, we analyse the phrase 'Do not ask how'/'Don't ask how'/'Don't ask'/'Do not ask' under the headline of the textual-conceptual function of negation and implied meaning. The phrase is repeated eleven times in the poem out of which nine occurrences appear in lines 1 through 33 (the poem has 208 lines in total) in the beginning of the poem. In fact, the poem begins with this phrase. It is presented in interrogative (questions) and imperative (directives) sentences, in lines 17 and 18 it provides both the (rhetorical) question and the subsequent answer. The high frequency of repetitions, especially in the beginning of the poem, has a foregrounding effect and invites if not even urges the reader to do the opposite and ask this question. Furthermore, the frequent repetition creates a contradictory effect to the literal meaning of the phrase: Although the phrase forbids to ask the question 'how', the expression of absence draws attention to the possibility of presence (Nahajec, 2012, p. 39),

that is to ask that question, and thus makes the reader aware of an alternative scenario (Jeffries, 2010, p. 106).

Negation usually works on two levels, first it creates a pragmatic presupposition (that is the meaning tied to particular words, here the negator 'not' that is added to the auxiliary, (Levinson, 1983, p. 167ff)) and secondly, a conversational implicature arises from flouting the cooperation maxims in conversation (Grice, 1975) in that, for example, the conversation is not as direct and therefore as informative as it could be. In the phrase under scrutiny ('don't ask'), the pragmatic presupposition is that the (implied) narrator presupposes that the reader wants to know how this incident happened and that the reader has questions (which is the meaning of the phrase without the negating participle - do ask). By adding a negative particle (the negator 'not'), the narrator implies that there is no use in asking questions about the incident. That would be the meaning of this phrase if Bekas had used it only once in the poem. However, the repetitive use of the phrase 'don't ask' and its grammatical variations adds an additional third layer of meaning to the discussed meaning conveyed by the pragmatic presupposition and implicature. In fact, the frequent repetition of the phrase annuls negation and brings back the positive meaning of 'do ask' the question 'how'. Why does Bekas use this detour to get the reader to ask this question, especially because he could have said so straight away? This has something to do with hedging, a politeness strategy (Leech, 2014) described in pragmatics, where it could be regarded a face-threatening act to be direct and is considered more polite to, for example, express a request indirectly. Viewed against the background of Bekas' poem in the time of the Ba'ath regime and the already ongoing public protests following the incident, it becomes clear why Bekas felt the need to disguise his request to the reader of the poem.

In addition, Bekas uses this strategy to avoid presenting his own point of view expressively and opts for an indirect means of expression. Point of view is the 'angle of telling' a story (Simpson, 1993, p. 2) and thus a 'projection of positions and perspectives, as a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions' (Simpson, 1993, p. 2). A comprehensive analysis of point of view expressed in this poem is not possible due to time/space constraints. However, building on the already established requests with which Bekas addresses the reader (to actually ask the question 'how'), we end our presentation with positioning Bekas in regard to the text.

The phrase 'Do not ask how' is the negation of a verbalisation process (Simpson, 1993, p. 90), that is verbally asking the question 'how'. Classifying the predicator in terms of transitivity (as recommended by Jeffries under the headline of the second textual-conceptual function, namely 'Representing actions/events/states') sheds light on 'how speakers encode in language their mental picture of reality and how they account for their experience of the world around them' (Simpson, 1993, p. 88). Asking the question 'how' has an additional layer of meaning which is the metaphorical meaning that by asking this question, the sayer extends a verbal, one-sentence utterance to an act of actively searching for truth and information about how the students died. Considered in light of speech act theory, asking this question thus becomes a speech act (Searle, 1969) that, by and in itself, can be regarded an act of doing and thus a material action intention in transitivity terms. Asking questions and searching for the truth metaphorically leads on to a subsequent process of mental cognition, a process of revelation and realisation. This is how Bekas pictures the ideal and thus implied reader (Genette, 1980 p. 260; 1988p. 135ff) of his poem. This reader is able to decipher Bekas' implicit request to do something by critically search for answers and thereby revealing the truth.

Bekas is the author of the poem in the discourse world as well as the implied author in the text world (Werth, 1999) of the poem, addressing the implied and therefore ideal reader

(Genette, 1980 p. 260; 1988p. 135ff). Bekas furthermore also appears as the first person narrator evidenced, for example, in lines 51 through 53:

51 It is very possible my heart neighbourhood.

52 My eye house.

53 My room of my soul and my abdomen.

The use of the possessive pronoun 'my' indicates the presence of a narrator who also addresses a 'you', that is the implied reader, for example by means of the imperative 'Do not ask how'. Bekas' presence in the text world of this poem becomes even more obvious by the metaphorical aligning of the narrator's physical body with urban structure ('neighbourhood', 'house', 'room'), a phenomenon we also found and described in relation to Bekas' poem 'Sculpture' from the collection 'The Small Mirrors' (Ibrahim, 2021; Ibrahim & Tabbert, 2021). The effect is that Bekas almost melts with the city of Suleymaniyah and its people, and draws the (implied) reader into this union, making it a very personal message by framing (Fillmore, 1982, 1985) the incident as a matter that concerns all. However, Bekas by means of politeness strategies (hedging), implied meaning (through repeated use of negation), conceptual metaphors, the use of questions and repetition as rhetorical tools as well as his choice of the predicator (transitivity) presents meaning on an implicit or subtle level instead of providing a one-sided account of events. Bekas asks questions (or rather one question 'Do ask how?') and invites the reader to do the same.

6. Conclusion

Bekas, the 'mother poet of Kurdistan', cannot remain silent when he witnesses injustice as in the case of the killing of the three students on December 17, 1985 in his hometown Suleymaniyah. And Bekas most certainly has an opinion on it that he wishes to express. He is not known for staying silent on political issues and most certainly not when it concerns his own people. He has repeatedly chosen historical events as topics for his poems, such as the chemical attack in the Kurdish city of Halabja on March 16, 1988 during the Iran-Iraq War that killed an estimate of 5,000 people and injured many more. Bekas made this massacre the topic of his poems 'Halabja' (Bekas, 2019) or 'Sculpture' as part of the collection 'The Small Mirrors' (Bekas, 2006) among others.

In this article we have looked at a rather lengthy poem that deals with another political event and have chosen the framework of Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) to discover the ideological meaning projected by the text. We acknowledge that there is a certain degree of contextual knowledge necessary to understand the meaning of this poem and we also acknowledge that our analysis focuses on the English translation of the original Kurdish text which does not permit us to include rhyme and rhythm in our analysis as they most certainly got lost in translation, unfortunately. We hasten to add that one of the present authors is a native speaker of Kurdish who was born and raised in the Kurdish area of Iraq and therefore possesses the relevant cultural knowledge and is familiar with the Kurdish language to analytically decipher the meaning of this highly political text.

The linguistic and poetic tools Bekas uses in this poem address an informed reader. However, the beauty of the language he uses (that shines through even in the English translation and is much richer in the original text) and the numerous conceptual metaphors touch the reader also on an emotional level. They raise core issues of identity, belonging and injustice. We are aware that our analysis as presented here is far from being comprehensive but rather focused on selected passages to which we were pointed by frequency counts. We have shown a way to decipher Bekas political statement by means of a detailed stylistic analysis and we added a critical view because this text is one of those that has the 'power to influence us' (Jeffries, 2010 p. 1).

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